

EFL Teaching Methodology: a Retrospective on Four Decades of Language Teaching

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要旨

私は14年間愛知大学で英語を教えているが、今日まで42年間にわたり外国人に対する英語教育に携わってきた。本稿は英語教授法に関する見解をインタビュー形式で述べたものである。インタビュアーのトロイ・マケイミッシュ氏はかつて愛知大学で教えた経験があり、インタビューはEメールによって行われた。このインタビューでは次のような内容を扱っている。

1. 60年代後半における言語学習へのコミュニカティヴ・アプローチ導入の影響。ペアワーク/グループワーク及び教室でよい雰囲気を作り出すことの重要性。
2. 学生の意欲を刺激し授業の初めに注意を引くことの重要性。劇的な効果の使用。
3. 学生の学習スタイルを考慮に入れることの重要性。「コミュニカティヴ・アプローチ」は単純に西洋から東洋へと置き換えることはできない。教師は学生の過去の学習スタイル

ル(文法訳読式教授法)を知っておく必要があり、次第に注意深くコミュニケーションアプローチのスタイルを導入するのがよい。学生はペアワーク/グループワークの意図を納得する必要がある。学生の文化的背景(話したいという意志/話すことに関する制約)が考慮される必要がある。学生は東洋における儒教的な教育の背景とは異なる言語学習に対する自立的かつ積極的な取り組みの必要性を理解して受け入れる必要がある。

4. 授業において学生の体制を整えることの重要性。学生が戸惑うことを避け、積極的な雰囲気を作るべきである。情意フィルターは低くし、文法を指導したり、訳すことも時には拒否するべきではなく、こうしたことをコミュニケーション・アプローチに統合するべきである。
5. 学生は間違いを失敗としてではなく、成功へのステップとして考えることが求められる。
6. 学生はペアワーク/グループワークの意味を理解し授業に積極的であることが求められる。
7. 指導にあたって説明が求められる場面では、教師が話す時間を増やして長い説明をするよりも学生に対話のモデルを示し、できるだけユーモを交えて行われることが望ましい。
8. よい教師のいくつかの特徴を示す。
9. 「柔軟性」と「適切さ」は授業でテキストを使う際のキーワードである。テキストは献立表とみなされるべきものであり、そこから教師は自分の学生に何がふさわしいかを選ぶことができる。
10. 自分のクラスを運営する個々の教師の自由はきわめて重要である。しかしながら学生に4年間の適切なプログラムを提供するために教師の目標、教材、シラバスに関してできる限りの調整がされるべきである。

The following paper consists of an interview that was held with the author in October 2010 concerning his 42 years of experience teaching English to foreign students. The questions were framed by Troy McCamish, a past Aichi University EFL teacher at present resident in the USA studying for an M.A. in Education at Shenandoah University, Virginia. The interview was conducted by e-mail.

It is hoped that the contents may be of interest to other EFL teachers and offer some insights into the problems encountered by the author during quite a long period of language teaching and his attempts to solve them.

QUESTIONS

1. *Jon, is there anyone within the TESOL profession who you would say has had a significant impact on you in forming the beliefs you have as a teacher? If so, can you relay something particular that you continue to “carry” with you into your classes as a result of their influence?*

Yes. A book published some time in the 60s (I think by Oxford University Press) entitled ‘English in Situations’ by a now well-known British author - Robert O’Neill. It was a teacher’s book which gave amusing and motivating drills (amazingly not a contradiction in terms) that the teacher could use with students in class. A particular grammatical structure was targeted, a diagnostic situation was read to the students to see if it was a structure that they had mastered or not, and practice provided if necessary by use of humorous substitution drills. O’Neill himself was a gifted teacher and I particularly remember a workshop where he demonstrated getting a pair of students sitting perhaps in opposite corners of the room, to make eye-contact and ask and answer questions aloud. At a time when the grammar / translation influence was still strong, it was an eye-opener to see how students could actually say something reasonably communicatively to each other in class rather than just be passive recipients of a teacher-centered grammar translation class, where if any talking took place at all it would probably be translating in a predictable order ‘round the class’ so that most students had little cause to pay any attention! I also became aware through O’Neill that students could have fun in class and I began to understand the importance of creating a good class atmosphere to increase student motivation.

Today I still ‘carry’ the importance of promoting student motivation, having fun in class and an awareness of the value of pair work, plus the importance of having a student-centered rather than a teacher-centered classroom. Also the importance of cutting down on teacher-talking time - although, in my case, I think I actually talk much more in class than I think I do!

2. *Would you mind sharing how many years you have been teaching EFL/ESL and whether your basic classroom approach has changed much during that time? And, if so,*

how has it changed? If not, could you summarize the fundamental tenets that have remained intact?

I must have been teaching since 1968 - around 42 years.

Fundamental tenets:

1. Real estate agents hold the principle 'Location! Location! Location!' Perhaps for language teachers it's 'Motivation! Motivation! Motivation!'
2. Try to promote a good class atmosphere. If we show our students that we genuinely care about their progress and care about them as human beings, then they are more likely to respond positively.
3. As often as possible 'GRAB THEIR ATTENTION RIGHT FROM THE START' (This is sometimes referred to as the first phase of 'engaging' the students (Engage/Study/Activate), (see Harmer, Jeremy, 1998). Rather than beginning: 'Turn to page 35 in your textbooks. . .' we should do something unusual that illustrates the structure or function to be focused on in order to capture their attention. The more dramatic, the better!

Change in Approach

- 1 When younger I tended to reject the Grammar / Translation Method out of hand in favor of the 'Communicative' approach. I now realize that one should also take students' aims and learning styles into account. A student who needs to read difficult medical texts will have different needs from one who needs to give a sales presentation or be able to communicate well enough to survive in an English speaking country. I think a synthesis of communicative approach and grammar translation approaches is more likely to succeed when taking into account the specific needs of the student. It is unlikely that either approach alone will completely meet the average students' requirements. Also one needs to be aware of the students' learning styles. Those students who are weaned exclusively on GT method (e.g. Japanese although the situation is improving a little) will find it

difficult to adapt suddenly to a communicative teaching/learning style with pair work / group work, etc. In such cases maybe it's best that the teacher explains and justifies taking a more communicative approach than the students may be used to.

2 I didn't at first realize the importance of being aware of the cultural background of one's students and how that may influence their behavior in the classroom (e.g. communicating in pair work / groups) / attitudes to study, etc. For example, Japanese are much less willing to express their opinions than, say, Italians or South Americans. Some nationalities (again the Japanese come to mind) are much more passive in class than other nationalities. They find taking responsibility for their own learning (autonomous learning) challenging and tend to wait for the teacher to always guide them in their study (Chinese Confucian influence). Without a relevant cultural awareness one can sometimes misjudge students' classroom behavior and attitude to learning.

3. As someone who has learned other languages (German, Japanese. . .) how has your own language learning influenced the way you go about teaching EFL/ESL?

Through trying to learn other languages (i.e. being on the receiving end) I have noticed a few points.

1. I believe that the teacher should always try to put him / herself in the position of the student. For example, if I am corrected by my teacher (perhaps somewhat abruptly) in class then I feel embarrassed and become demotivated. Therefore when I teach, I try to make sure that I never embarrass a student.

2. If I don't understand something as a student, I might talk to my partner in my native language to try to get an explanation. The teacher probably thinks I am rude and not attending. Therefore, when students talk to each other in class, perhaps the teacher needs to find out why they are talking before showing disapproval.

3. Although an advocate of the 'communicative approach' (given an appropriate

teaching situation), I have found that, as a student, I still crave a clear grammatical explanation - if possible, if my target language level is not high, in my native language.

4. Is there anything particular that you stress to your students (as far as their approach to learning) to best ensure their success in learning English?

Yes.

1. I stress that they should not be afraid of making mistakes - and try to back this up by saying that I and other people in the class will not (be allowed to) laugh at anyone who makes a mistake. English is like riding a bike. You sometimes fall off. If you don't fall off, you'll never find out how to stay on. Basically, I tell them that if they are not making mistakes then they are not making progress. Every mistake is a STEP FORWARD!!! (Or it can be - if you make the effort to learn from your mistakes).

2. As my students now are Japanese I stress the importance of being active in class during pair and group work. I explain that it's easier for them to make a mistake without feeling embarrassed when working in a pair or group. They no longer need to be afraid that they will feel like a SCARED RABBIT being stared at by every member of the class as a whole. So, they should accept the challenge and be more active in class when working in pairs and in groups.

5. Do you ever encounter students in your classes who have different beliefs about how they should be learning English (and manage to express them). Is there a scenario that comes to mind?

Yes.

On one occasion a Chinese student told me that she didn't like working in pairs / groups because she was afraid she would pick up mistakes made by other students. I wasn't sure how to deal with this one.

I told her that if she didn't try to communicate with others it would be difficult to improve her own English. If one day she wanted to communicate with an English native speaker, but had virtually never opened her mouth in class, she would have had no practice and therefore little confidence.

I also explained that although accuracy was important, the main aim should probably be to achieve successful communication, and that this was possible without 100% accuracy. I also pointed out that it might be the case that her partner's English was actually better than hers (maybe her partner had studied longer / had a very good accent, etc). Maybe she shouldn't assume that with every partner she would hear many mistakes compared with her own English.

I said that I would try to monitor her carefully and give her corrections as much as possible since this was what she would find useful. I also suggested that she should listen to as much native speaker English as possible outside class. (movies / pop-music / Obama speeches, etc.!) I don't know how convinced she was. Indeed, in some ways I think she was right. The best learning situation is probably one-to-one with a native teacher. (But it's expensive!).

6. (Assuming the answer to question 4 was affirmative), do you ever find yourself accommodating certain classroom practices to more closely match student expectations? If yes, would you mind giving an example? If no, how do you handle such situations?

In my answer to Question 4 I stressed the importance of students being active in class and being willing to give their opinions / information to other students. Therefore, (if I understand your question correctly) I have modified student expectations to the extent that they will expect me to provide them with opportunities to be active. I therefore need to show them how to be active, for example when engaged in pair work.

One classroom practice I have modified (invented for myself) is to demonstrate clearly to the students what it is that I expect of them and in what way they can be

active. I place 2 chairs slightly facing towards each other and both chairs facing the class. I then sit on one chair as 'STUDENT A' and on the second chair as 'STUDENT B'. Then, moving from chair to chair (to the amusement of the class) I proceed to model the kind of paired conversation I'm looking for (using vocabulary and structures that the students are familiar with - or vocabulary / structures that have just been introduced and now require oral practice). For example, in order to maintain a conversation, students A and B should not merely answer in monosyllables or just a couple of words. They need to be able to elaborate on the answer to the question they are asked. They also need to show that they are listening to the answers carefully (making suitable English-type listening noises / phrases) by asking follow-up questions in order to keep the conversation going without allowing awkward silences (at least, awkward for the Westerner as our culture allows much shorter silences than does the Japanese).

7. Jon, I know from my time working under you that you have a practice of observing classes taught by the temporary teachers. Are there certain things you are looking for during those observations that help give you confidence that the school has hired a 'good' teacher?

Yes. For example:

- 1 Arrive on time, smiling and welcoming students as they come in.
- 2 Have a clear plan of how the lesson is expected to go. (Although a willingness to deviate from the plan if a situation conducive to language-learning crops up during the class is also important).
- 3 A firm but friendly approach to the students. An ability to promote a positive, (and in a conversation class) lively atmosphere.
- 4 A sense of humor.
- 5 In a conversation class, use of pair and group work to maximize student-talking time. Not too much time spent on explanations of activities or grammar points.
- 6 Use of L1, but with occasional use of Japanese if this saves a long explanation in English.
- 7 The ability to bond as much as possible with students and show an interest in them as people.

- 8 An ability to organize students into various pairs / groups efficiently and vary the lay-out of chairs / tables appropriately and efficiently.
- 9 Careful and helpful monitoring (not towering above the students, but crouching or sitting at the same level).
- 10 If the teacher can say at the end of the class:

1. The students enjoyed that class.
2. I enjoyed that class.
3. I (pretty much) achieved my aims for that class. The students were able to do what I hoped they could do.
4. I'm looking forward to the next class and I believe that they are too!

(I have to say that these aims are difficult to achieve. I'm not sure that I have ever achieved them in one complete lesson!).

8. Given the experience you have both as a textbook creator and classroom teacher, how useful are textbooks in the EFL/ESL classroom? Is there any rule of thumb you would suggest to new teachers regarding their use of textbooks?

Textbook writers are usually experienced teachers and guided by experienced editors. I wouldn't throw a textbook out just because it's a textbook. There are often very valuable, exciting and motivating activities to be found in textbooks. They are also effective time-savers. It takes a long time to create new activities (for example from the internet) and these activities will be first-timers (not piloted as are the activities in many good textbooks). However, textbooks can also be boring, inappropriate and de-motivating. They can also become out of date when it is more interesting to deal with topical matters. My rule of thumb would be:

'Match the textbooks to the learning situation'.

Perhaps also 'flexibility' and 'appropriacy' are key-words. If one accepts that a textbook can have both advantages and shortcomings, one's decision to use (some of) it or not should be based on how appropriate the material is for the students who will be using it. It may also be that in a 'negotiated syllabus' where students

themselves are allowed to select their own topics (for examples presentations which use the internet for resource material) a textbook would become redundant.

Perhaps a textbook should be treated in the same way as a menu in a restaurant. To dine on everything available would be inadvisable. Just choose the best bits for whoever is sitting around the table!

9. How much has Aichi University shaped your role in your classes? For example have certain policies or standards within the language department affected the way you approach your classes?

I have been lucky at Aichi University. There is a basic 'university as a whole' policy that we need to choose a textbook for our conversation class students and some other classes also require textbooks. However, when I came to the university I thought that regarding textbooks a flexible attitude would be more appropriate and that it should be left to each teacher how much they wished to rely on the textbook (given that some use was made of it as the students were obliged to buy it). (See answer to Question 8, above).

It may be that younger teachers may rely more on textbooks than more experienced teachers who may also enjoy creating their own materials.

10. Would your role in the classroom be different if you worked in a different institution in which you were the president of the school? If yes, how would it differ?

In general, no. I don't think so. I have a lot of freedom to teach in the way that I wish and this is a very positive aspect indeed of working at Aichi University.

However, if you had asked me, not about my role in the classroom, specifically, but about the language materials I make use of, then maybe a more difficult question arises. At the moment any teacher in any year is virtually free to choose their own textbook / teaching materials. That of course is wonderful for the teacher, but it may cause a problem for students. For example, in Year 1 a particular teacher may choose a certain textbook that covers a particular syllabus within one of the four skills. In the second year, it's possible that a different teacher might choose an 'easier'

or very much more difficult book than the one used by the previous teacher. In other words there is no carefully thought-through syllabus that ensures gradual progression and improvement through from Years 1-4. Also the total syllabi for the 4 skills are in no way integrated. We do not know that the materials that are being used for each year are roughly at the same level for the 4 skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening.

It may well be possible to create a broad integrated skills framework for years 1 through 4 while still retaining as large a degree of flexibility as possible. For example, allowing teachers a certain freedom of choice of materials provided that said materials fall within a general framework of staged level of difficulty. That might be an attainable aim that would benefit both students and teachers and approach optimum syllabus design.

Bibliography:

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